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PEERS AND M.P.s,  
OR,  
LORDS AND COMMONS.

PARLIAMENTARY ORATORS AND ORATORY.

THE Marquis of Lansdowne is rarely heard in the Lords now; but in the Commons, which he entered as Lord Henry Petty, his first speech raised great expectations of his subsequent career, and some were so enthusiastic in their praise as to deem him worthy to rival the oratorical fame of Pitt. His speech on the charges of embezzlement, brought against Lord Melville, was highly applauded at the time. He said: "Let it be remembered how the persons were situated who were thus connected together: Mr. Mark Scott, the broker, confidentially employed by Mr. Trotter, the paymaster; Mr. Trotter, the paymaster, confidentially employed by Lord Melville; and Lord Melville confidentially employed by the public. He had heard of Jacobin combinations and of other combinations, but it would be difficult to imagine any combination more detrimental to the public than that of these three persons, who touched the cabinet on the one side and the stocks on the other. What changes of fortune, what convulsions in finance, was it not capable of effecting! He trusted that the event of that night would show that, whatever difference of opinion might exist, if indeed there did exist any, on the principles of government or on the application of those principles to public measures, yet when such questions as these came to be determined—whether the law should or should not be observed; whether the public expenditure should be watched or should pass unexamined or uncontrolled—there was to be found but one voice, one opinion, and one cause; the cause of men of all descriptions, who pretended to any sort of principle, in opposition to those who either did not profess any, or, what was as dangerous if not as bad, who thought none essential to the honour, the safety, and the existence of the country." The Duke of Newcastle is young, and has yet to win fame, but he has much in his favour. He possesses a great power of fluent oratory, and whenever he addresses the house, is listened to with attention and respect. Lord Clarendon has been the hero of many a party contest. He cannot take his stand amongst the first orators of the day. His rank in political life has, undoubtedly, been acquired by his abilities. The fact that he rose from being a Customs' commissioner to be viceroy of Ireland and secretary for foreign affairs, as a late writer in the *Athenæum* remarked, is proof of his secretarial energy and talent in a department of the state. As a debater he wants practice and physical power. His voice is not loud enough for the stormy combats of the senate. He often hesitates, and his nervous temperament gives him a flurried manner which detracts from the weight of his argument. Yet he has great insinuation and address. Eminent as are his talents, even his admirers would scarcely say that he has the *vivida vis animi* of Lord John Russell or Lord Palmerston. He wants massiveness and muscularity of intellect. The Duke of Argyll, the youngest member of the cabinet, is perhaps one of the most fluent men in it. You are not long in the Lords before you are aware of his presence. His red face and small juvenile figure attract you at once. He took his seat in that assembly on his father's death in 1847, and in May of the following year, he delivered his first speech on the motion for the second reading of the bill for admitting Jews to Parliament. His speech made a great impression on the house, presenting as it did a defence of the measure on religious rather than political grounds. He commenced by disclaiming all sympathy with certain theories that had been put forth—that Christianity had nothing to do with making the laws of a country. He showed in a strain of clear argument, enforced by an easy, flowing, and natural eloquence, that Christianity lay at the root of all that was just and right and true; and that the nation which systematically excluded Christianity from its laws, must end in speedy ruin. At the same time he could not agree with the opponents of the measure, that Christianity consisted in a mere set of forms and symbols, compliance with which should secure and refusal exclude admission to the legislature. On the contrary, he maintained that Christianity would be best manifested by abolishing all invidious distinctions

which excluded any citizen from obtaining the offices and honours of the state, and by maintaining the right of the constituencies of the empire to their free choice of whatever representatives they pleased to select. The speech was received with great favour in the house, and the duke was at once hailed as one of the most promising ornaments of which the senate could boast. Like another nobleman who confers honour on his order—the Earl of Carlisle—the duke lectures to mechanics' institutions, and lectures well.

But, after all, the real orators in the house are not in the cabinet, but out of it; and they live upon their reputations, and are satisfied, as well they may be, with the pleasures of memory. Foremost amongst them is the Earl of Derby, the *tutamen et decus* of one of the most powerful parties in the state. But, as with all true orators, it was in the lower house that his laurels were won. His first speech of any importance was that against Mr. Hume's motion on the temporalities of the Irish Church. That speech helped him to the honourable title he has so long worn as "the very Rupert of debate." One of the most remarkable feats he ever accomplished was his delivery, during one of the Irish debates, of Hotspur's address to his uncles, at the close of a great debate, and when the house was eager for a division. His rating the Whigs with their truckling to O'Connell was terrible when it came couched in the language of England's dramatist:—

"But shall it be that you—that set the crown  
Upon the head of this forgetful man,  
And for his sake wear the detested blot  
Of murderous subordination—shall it be  
That you a world of curses undergo;  
Being the agents, or base second means,  
The cords—the ladder—or the hangman rather?  
Oh, pardon me! that I descend so low  
To show the line and the predicament  
Wherein you range under *this subtle king*.  
Shall it for shame be spoken in these days,  
Or fill up chronicles in time to come,  
That men of your nobility and power  
Did 'gaze them both in an unjust behalf,  
As both of you, God pardon it! have done,  
To put down Richard, that sweet lovely rose,  
And plant this thorn, this canker, Bolingbroke?  
And shall it in more shame be further spoken,  
That you are fooled, discarded, and shook off  
By him for whom these shames ye underwent?  
No, yet time serves wherein you may redeem  
Your banished honours, and restore yourselves  
Into the good thought of this world again.  
Revenge the jeering and disdained contempt  
Of this proud king, who studies day and night  
To answer all the debt he owes to you  
Even with the bloody payment of your deaths."

The effect Lord Stanley—for that was the earl's title then—produced by this extract was startling. It required no ordinary degree of courage to deliver a quotation so long and so dangerous to a crowded house at a late hour. The sensation created was appalling from the extraordinary power of emphasis thrown into the delivery. No actor could have given the passage with more startling effect. It has been remarked, that to a nobleman of talent it is a disadvantage to commence life in the House of Peers. It is but rarely that the debates are conducted there on a scale large enough to justify those flights of eloquence which, successful in a crowded assembly, seem almost ridiculous before a couple of score of languid peers. The Earl of Derby had the advantage of entering public life in the lower house, and at a time, too, when party feeling was high. His contest with O'Connell was personal and passionate in the extreme. The latter held him up to the indignation of the Irish as the scorpion Stanley, and the former repaid the Irish agitator with terrible invective, equally vehement, and far more polished than his own. In the upper house, the debates would be indeed dull, were it not for the earl's appearance on the scene. Lyndhurst is a masterly orator; but he belongs to the past. You can hardly recognise, in the now shrunken form, a man formerly deemed one of the most powerful intellects of our age. It

matters not that such as Lyndhurst vanish. The House of Lords is not the place for oratory. The first orators of the day may get there; but once there, they give themselves no trouble about oratorical display. Indeed, from the independent members you have no chance of a good speech, unless Lord Ellenborough is on his legs. His lordship reminds one of the once popular orator, Henry Brougham. There was a time when you could never enter the House of Lords without seeing that grotesque figure and hearing that powerful tongue; and some of his most splendid speeches have been delivered there. Yet it is undeniably true, that it was in the Commons Brougham won his name and fame. Only the seniors of the present generation can recollect him, when, in the meridian of his powers, he found in Canning a fitting foe. The men of those times tell us, we shall never witness such intellectual gladiatorship again. As it would be impossible to give an idea of Brougham's eloquence, we shall close this chapter by abridging a graphic description, published some years since in "Modern Babylon." The writer was in the house on one of the occasions to which we have referred. He tells us of the crowded state of the house, of all eyes being turned in one direction, and how, amidst universal expectation, Henry Brougham rose to reply and attack. He says:—

"After this bustle of preparation, and amid the breathless silence which follows it, Henry Brougham takes a slow and hesitating pace towards the table, where he stands crouched together, his shoulders pulled up, his head bent forward, and his upper lip and nostril agitated by a tremulous motion, as though he were afraid to utter even a single sentence. His first sentences, or rather the first members of his sentence—for you soon find that with him a sentence is more extended both in form and substance than the whole oration of other men—come forth cold and irresolute, and withal so wide of the question that you are unable to perceive how they shall be bent so as to bear on it. When, however, a sufficient number of these propositions have been enunciated—and the enunciation is always such as to carry the demonstration with it—it moves on towards the conclusion, firm as the Macedonian phalanx, and irresistible as a bayonet-charge of the mountaineers of the North. One position being thus carried with the appearance of weakness and want of resolution, but with a reality of power and of determination which make themselves to be felt in the certainty with which it commands your assent, the orator rises upon it both in body and in mind, and wins a second by a more bold and brief attack. To a second succeeds a third, to a third a fourth, and so on, till the whole principles and the whole philosophy of the question have acknowledged their conqueror—till every man in the house who has ears to hear and a heart to understand, be as irresistibly convinced of the abstract truth as he is of his own existence." The writer continues: "When, as already mentioned, he has laid the foundation in the utmost extent of philosophy and the profoundest depth of reason—when he has returned to it again, applying the rule and the plummet to see that the erection is orderly, and feeling with the touch of a giant to ascertain that it is secure—when he has bound the understandings of the house and the spectators in cords of argument which they are equally indisposed and unable to break—he vaults upon the subdued bases, rises in figure and in tone, calls forth the passions from their inmost recesses, overtops and shakes the gaping members and the echoing house. That voice, which was at first so low, now assumes the deafening roar and the determined swell of the ocean; that form, which at the beginning seemed to be sinking under its own weight, now looks as if it were nerved with steel, strung with brass, and immortal and unchangeable as the truths which in his calmer mood he uttered; that countenance, which ofttime bore the hue and the coldness of stone, is now animated at every point and beaming in every feature, as though the mighty utterance were all inadequate to the mightier spirit within; and those eyes, which when he began turned their blue and tranquil disks on you, as if supplicating your forbearance and your pardon, now shoot forth their meteor-fires, till every one upon whom they beam be kindled into admiration, and men of all parties wish in their hearts that Brougham were one of us." We must curtail the description, though it cut us to the quick to do so, so accurate is the picture of Brougham in his palmy days. The writer speaks then of the whisper in which Brougham speaks. "It is the signal that he is putting on his whole armour, and

about to grasp the mightiest of his weapons." If you looked, "you would perceive some small man quivering and twittering, as little birds do when within charming distance of rattle-snakes, conscious of danger, yet deprived of even the means of self-protection, and courting destruction with the most piteous and frantic imbecility; you would perceive a slender antagonist clutching the back of the bench with quivering talons, lest the coming tempest should sweep him away; or you would see the portly and appropriate figure of the representative of the quorum of some fat county, delving both his fists into the cushion, fully resolved that, if a man of his weight should be blown out of the house, he would yet secure his seat by carrying it along with him. It comes! the words which were so low and muttered, become so loud that the speaker absolutely drowns the cheering of his own party; and after he has peeled some hapless offender to the bone, and tossed about his mangled remains through all the modes and forms of speech, the body of the orator, being subdued and beaten down by the energy of his own mind—an energy which you can neither help feeling nor succeed in describing—sinks down, panting, exhausted, almost a lifeless corpse."

We have now nearly concluded our parliamentary survey. We have seen the changes and wonders wrought by time in the constitution, practice, and influence of the two Houses of Parliament. Once, all power was in the crown—then again, the barons were omnipotent—then came the great fact which Whigs drink at their dinners as a standing toast—"The People, the source of all political power!" So long as England remains great—till the melancholy vision of Macaulay be realised, and the traveller from New Zealand shall stand on the broken arches of Westminster Bridge and view the ivied ruins of St. Paul's—the power of parliament must be paramount in our midst. As the source of legislation, as the great motive power of government, as the final court of appeal, it must ever live; its future annals may have in them less of excitement, party warfare may be toned down, men's passions may grow calmer, elsewhere talent may seek the distinction hitherto to be found on the floor of St. Stephen's alone; side-by-side with parliament may exist a press of greater power, of higher aim, of more comprehensive views; still it will live, rich in past glories and present good, answering the necessities of the time, translating into legal acts the spirit of the age. Every year its duties will be simpler—every year the people will rise superior to their representatives, unless humanity be a failure and progress an idle dream.

What splendid memories cluster round the old house! By the table in that chapel, afterwards stained with Percival's blood, the brow of the boldest warrior has turned pale as he stood up to receive the thanks of the house, and with trembling voice stammered forth his gratitude. Blake, and Albemarle, and Schomberg, Marlborough, and a greater even than that proud captain, the hero of a hundred fights, the Duke of Wellington, have there drunk in the pealing applause which heralded Westminster Abbey. At that bar the proudest of England's peers have bent the head to deprecate the Commons' vengeance; the governors of millions—the ministers of state—have there bowed the knee, and in their impeachment confessed the grandeur of the great national inquest. There the noblest sons of genius—Bacon, and Newton, and Wren, Addison, Gibson, and Mitford—have sat mute, but 'not inglorious.' There Oglethorpe taught the lesson of humanity in inspecting our prisons, and Meredith and Romilly pleaded against capital punishments, that criminals still were men. Those walls have rung with the shout of triumph as the slave-trade went down in its iniquity. Peals of laughter have awakened the echoes of that chamber to generations of wits—Martin and Coventry, Charles Townshend, and Sheridan, and Canning. The hollow murmurs of sympathy have there rung back the funeral tribute to the elder and younger Pitt, to Grenville and Horner, to that eloquent orator, conspicuous among his countrymen, Grattan, who, in his dying hour, there poured forth his soul. What exhilarating cheers—the only rewards to St. John for those lost orations which have perished for ever—have there rewarded the oratory of Pitt and Fox."

The new house can have no such glory. The giants of former days have laboured, and we, their descendants, have entered into their labours. The seed has been sown—for the future nothing is left but to gather in the harvest.